

THE epicenter



Proud of our Veterans,
Proud of America!

Employee Newsletter of the VA Palo Alto Health Care System • 2005 • Edition 3

25-pound Tumor Removed from Liver

Surgeon Performs Rare Surgery

The risk of failure was high. This type of cancer had only been taken out once before in the world. But for former Army tank mechanic John F. Frick, whose liver had a 25-pound, malignant tumor embedded in it, there were no options.

"I'm a mechanic. I was used to fixing broken things," said Frick. "Now I was broken. I needed someone to fix me and I turned to VA."

Frick, 61, got exactly what he needed and his doctor and surgical team were overjoyed with their surgical success. Leading Frick's nine-hour surgery on May 12, was Dr. Sherry Wren, chief, General Surgery at the Palo Alto Health Care System and Associate Professor of

Surgery at Stanford University. Her surgical team included three operating room nurses, a perfusionist (who focuses on blood circulation during surgery), two anesthesiologists and three other attending surgeons, including one of VA's and the nation's top cardiac surgeons, Dr. Thomas A. Burdon.

"I won't lie to anyone," said Dr. Wren, "this was the toughest surgery I've ever done and I wouldn't agree to it until Mr. Frick had written a Will. I knew what his odds were. After all, this type of liver surgery had only been done one other time successfully on a



Chuck Revell

Dr. Sherry Wren (center left) leads a team of surgeons and operating room staff to successfully remove a 25-pound tumor from the liver of John Frick. This was only the second time this type of surgery had ever been performed.

79-year-old woman in Kansas and her tumor was much smaller than Mr. Frick's."

Frick had no idea his tumor was so large. It had been a very slow growing tumor for years, so he just thought he was gaining weight. It wasn't until last winter that his symptoms got so bad that he came to the Palo Alto VA emergency room. He was given a drug called Gleevec in an effort to reduce the tumor's size. Rather than shrinking, however, it continued to grow at an alarming rate even as Frick was losing weight daily.

"Fact is, the tumor was eating before Mr. Frick was," said Dr. Wren. "I knew that without surgery Mr. Frick had only a short time to live."

It was then that Dr. Wren decided she had to try to save this veteran's life. She contacted the local blood bank to reserve a large backup supply of blood. She ran tests and studied the results with other doctors. She counseled and educated Mr. Frick and his three children. Finally, she put together a team of medical experts rarely seen in a private operating room, which included OR nurses Evie Glasa,

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Curt Campbell

Dr. Sherry Wren visits with John Frick following the difficult removal of a tumor from his liver.

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A Word From Our Director



**Elizabeth Joyce Freeman, Director
VA Palo Alto Health Care System**

As we head into the summer months, and into what will hopefully be some downtime for those of you planning summer vacations with families and friends, I hope you will also pause to reflect on some of the terrific accomplishments that we have achieved already this year.

As described in this newsletter in more detail, Cadence Design

Systems, Inc. held their Stars and Strikes fundraiser on May 14. This was the successful conclusion to months of their fundraising activities in support of our Fisher House. I wish all of you could have attended that event and witnessed the energy and enthusiasm of the numerous Cadence staff and volunteers who supported this effort. I never imagined a bowling alley could be transformed into such an exciting, celebrity-filled venue, but it was. Of course the biggest stars, front and center, were our patients from the Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Unit. They were bowling alongside the Cadence CEO, Chairman, Coach of the San Francisco 49ers and other celebrities and guests. The final total for these efforts is nearly \$1.3M.

Back at the Palo Alto Division, also on May 14, members of the Blue Star Mothers concluded their walk-a-thon, also in support of the Fisher House. Their fundraising efforts totaled nearly \$15,000 and their enthusiasm and heartfelt dedication to the cause of supporting veterans was just as grand as the Cadence effort.

To cap this exciting series of events, on May 16 we hosted the First Lady of California, Ms. Maria Shriver, at the Palo Alto Division. She visited both MSICU and the TBI and BIRU areas. Ms. Shriver was exceedingly gracious with everyone she encountered. I have escorted numerous VIPs over the past several months in our health care system, but she was easily the one who induced the broadest

smiles (and the most photographs)! She was escorted by the Secretary of the California State Department of Veterans Affairs, Tom Johnson. Secretary Johnson has been extremely interactive with the VA since his appointment and will be collaborating with us to ensure the families of our service members are receiving all the state-sponsored services available to them.

Outside the Palo Alto Division, we held the very successful CARES Local Advisory Panel (LAP) meeting on May 13. The coordination for this event was outstanding and the attendees received well delivered presentations and had ample opportunity to comment on the process for this next phase of CARES. The second LAP meeting will be held in early September. At this second meeting, the contractor will present various realignment options regarding the Livermore NHCU.

On June 2, I was privileged to represent VAPAHCS at the groundbreaking for the replacement clinic for our Stockton CBOC. Every speaker at this ceremony (and there were many) voiced their appreciation for veterans and their unrelenting support for more health care services for veterans. It was a great day for the staff and veterans in Stockton. I want to thank Robert Geldman and Ellen Shibata for their leadership and diligence that culminated in the successful signing of the lease agreement for this clinic.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the recent passing of three very special VAPAHCS employees: Mary Parker, Gary Goodwin and Patti Chapple. These losses were a great blow to us; I know many, many people were devastated with the suddenness of losing each of them. Working in a hospital setting, we are well acquainted with the fragility of life. I hope all of you take the time to enjoy and appreciate whatever brings you joy in your lives. I appreciate what each of you contributes to supporting the lives of our veterans.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elizabeth J. Freeman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "J" and "F".

Elizabeth Joyce Freeman
Director

VAPAHCS Hosts 60 High School Students

Sixty high school students recently visited the VA Palo Alto hospital and according to one of them, "After our tour, I know that you truly help people."

The students were from the Opportunities Industrialization Center West's (OICW) after school program. The students, from seven high schools in the area, participate in a program that offers elective credit in vocational courses such as electronics, digital video, web page design, office skills, and culinary arts.

John Sisty introduced the students to VAPAHCS, and then they viewed a video compiled from recent media coverage, highlighting the work of our renowned Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) unit. Next, they oversaw various activities at VAPAHCS related to their training classes at OICW. Students saw computerized robotics in action at the pharmacy, toured medical technology testing labs, and got to watch food service employees put the finishing touches on hundreds of meals.



"I never knew what the Veterans Hospital was. I thought it was an animal hospital," said one student. "I really liked the tour and it helped me appreciate what God gave me. It made me think about helping other people and to stop thinking about myself."

After the tour, VAPAHCS employees spoke of their own backgrounds and the problems they overcame, with help from the VA system, to reach their present positions at VAPAHCS.



Most telling, perhaps, were comments from Erica Cardenas: "I want to thank you for opening the doors of your hospital to us. I really learned a lot, and it showed me how much you really care about your community. What really made me think about how much you help people was when you showed us the video about the injured men. Looking at how they were and listening to the story they had to tell was very sad, but I'm glad you are there for them."

Livermore Doctor's Health Education Device Well Received by Community

The Patient Education and Service Kiosk, designed by Livermore Division's Dr. Leonard Goldschmidt, now provides patients at Mee Memorial Hospital's Greenfield Clinic with an easy-to-use health information resource in the patient waiting area.

The project won the Grand Prize of the 2002 California Pacific Award for Excellence in Patient Education, and Veteran Affairs clinics across the country have implemented the device over the past few years.

The ATM-like device with touch screen enables quick access to multimedia information on a variety of health topics, medicines, herbal remedies, and medical interactions. The device also provides printable vouchers redeemable for clinical care including diabetic eye and foot examinations and flu and pneumonia immunizations.

The machine has been well received even by veterans who have little experience using computers or accessing the internet for health information.

Dr. Leonard Goldschmidt shows a veteran how to use the Service Kiosk.



Chuck Revell

ELAM Program Enhances Woman's Leadership Skills



Curt Campbell

Juliana Barr, MD
*Staff Intensivist and Anesthesiologist,
VAPAHCS; Associate Professor in
Anesthesia, Stanford University
School of Medicine*

The Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine (ELAM) program was established a decade ago as the first in-depth national program that prepares women faculty for leadership positions at academic health centers.

The year-long ELAM curriculum combines traditional MBA training oriented toward issues and strategies pertinent to academic health management along with personal and professional development focused on leadership, career advancement, communication, and the use of new information and learning technologies. Moreover, ELAM provides a unique learning experience for 45 women at either

the Associate or full Professor Level from academic medicine, dentistry, and the basic sciences.

“Good leadership is hard to come by these days, particularly in Academic Medicine,” says Dr. Juliana Barr, Staff Intensivist and Anesthesiologist at VAPAHCS and recent ELAM graduate. “Few individuals applying for or promoted to positions of responsibility be it a department chair, institute director, chief of staff, or even a medical school dean have had any formal leadership training.”

Most of the course curriculum is in the distance learning format utilizing WebCT, conference calls, and email to complete course assignments and readings. There are also three separate week-long residency sessions over the course of the year. In the last ten years, ELAM matriculated over 400 women from its fellowship program with a majority later being promoted to leadership positions within academic health centers.

“As a recent graduate of the ELAM fellowship, this has been an extraordinary year for me. My ELAM experience fundamentally changes how I view the relationship between the VA Palo Alto Health Care System and Stanford Medical School and also the VA Health Care System’s relationship to academic medicine in general. For me, the end of ELAM marks a new beginning. I am forever grateful for the opportunity to have spent this year developing my leadership skills and getting to know such a remarkable group of women, whose relationships I will continue to nurture and cherish throughout my career,” says Dr. Barr.

Livermore Team Helps with On-Site Wedding

Spring brings a lot of beautiful things to our Livermore Campus: California poppies, white lilies, purple wisteria and vibrant green hills; but this spring brought an unusual event to the nursing home, A WEDDING!

During my usual visits with patients on the ward, I was asked if I could help a couple get to the Alameda County Recorder’s office to get their marriage certificate. This was certainly a new request for this social worker, and I told the couple that I would investigate how this could be done since the patient couldn’t leave the facility. I discovered that this could be done if the person who would be marrying the couple came to the recorder’s office with the bride.

Many thanks to a great team effort from medicine, Dr. Monique Kuo,

M.D; social work, Geri Root-Mauthe LCSW and Chaplain’s service, Protestant Chaplain Harold Rucker. Chaplain Rucker facilitated the needed paperwork and the Chaplain’s service went to the Recorder’s office with the bride.

The next morning, the staff and other veterans looked on as the happy couple got married. The staff helped decorate their room with purple, yellow and white spring flowers and with white and lavender roses from our home garden. The physician’s assistant (Winn) Carol Crannel made the brides bouquet of purple vanda orchids and white baby carnations. Veterans and staff volunteered to donate for a cake and helped celebrate the couple’s reception. Kathy Kelley decorated the patio area with pink white and blue balloons. It was truly an uplifting spring day for all.

Nursing Service: Making a Difference in Veterans' Lives

VAPAHCS' focus is and always will be America's veterans. But our pioneering work across the spectrum of health care benefits all Americans, and indeed, the world community. VAPAHCS nurses are a critical part of that legacy to humanity. In fact, nurses are the backbone of our country's health care system. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days a year, nurses answer the call.

From inner city hospitals to rural clinics, from Red Cross disaster centers to combat zones, from VA medical centers to home visits, nurses answer the call.

VAPAHCS is no exception. Make no mistake about it, much of the work nurses do is not celebrated, glamorous, or easy. But at VAPAHCS,

there is an added element to the service we provide. VA nurses minister to the men and women who — like those early American patriots — secured and defended all that we as a nation hold dear. In the face of competing job opportunities and career options that nurse's face today, VA nursing continues to offer a unique and challenging mission of service.

VAPAHCS's team of registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, advanced practice nurses, and nursing assistants is second to none. They have stood at the forefront of our Department's dramatic revolution in health care delivery. They have helped forge a new and profoundly better VA.

It's with Special Pleasure that VAPAHCS announces its 2005 Excellence in Nursing Overall Division Winners (left to right)



Anthony Albano, nursing assistant, joined the Spinal Cord Injury nursing staff in 2000. Not only does Albano provide the basic needs of our veterans such as bathing, feeding and transferring patients into their wheelchairs, he always does so with a positive attitude and cheerful smile.

Janis Marquez, RN, joined VA in 1986, and has worked at Menlo Park in mental health, the Spinal Cord Injury Unit, the Western Blind Rehab Center, PAD Ambulatory Care Clinic, and was one of the first RNs to volunteer her services at the Monterey Clinic. Throughout her many responsibilities, she always put veterans first and was a key team player with her health care colleagues.



Joanna Cronin, nursing staff educator and psychiatric clinical nurse, has developed, implemented and evaluated many programs throughout VAPAHCS. Collaboration is one of her greatest strengths and she is always willing to go the extra mile for staff and veterans.



Michael Austin, medical clerk, was nominated by several nurses on the Medical Surgical Unit for his responsiveness, kindness and his ability to keep a smooth running unit while on duty.



Nenita Barnes, LVN, has made a concerted effort to improve the ambulatory care environment. Always a team player, she nonetheless continues to take advantage of opportunities in leadership. She makes every clinic day a success.

Photos by Curt Campbell

Rickie Gable Takes Over as Chief of Police Services



Curt Campbell

Mr. Rickie Gable joined VAPAHCS on April 17 as the new Chief of Police Services. Prior to his VA assignment, Mr. Gable served for two years as the Chief, Security Forces Operations at Onizuka Air Force Station, Sunnyvale CA. During his nearly six-year tenure at Onizuka, he served as the Lead Police Investigator, Installation Anti-Terrorism Officer, Law Enforcement Superintendent, and the Base Resources Protection Officer. He also became the military liaison officer for the surrounding civil law enforcement agencies and served as one of two police representatives to advise the commanders Crisis Response Element during both exercise and actual emergency situations.

Mr. Gable's extensive Military Police background spans over 26 years of active duty with the United States Air Force as a Security Policeman both within the United States and overseas. During his military service, he participated in both Operation "Just Cause" in Panama and "Desert Shield" and "Desert Storm" in the Middle East.

Occupational Therapy Gets New Supervisor

Jean Gurga, MA, OTR/L, was recently appointed as Supervisor of Occupational Therapy (OT), managing all OT services provided at the VAPAHCS. Since April 2002, Ms. Gurga has worked primarily as a therapist for the Comprehensive Rehabilitation Center at VAPAHCS. In May 2003, she also completed training as a Driver Rehabilitation Specialist. Last year, Ms. Gurga graduated from the 2004 Emerging Leadership Development Program. Ms. Gurga gained extensive experience in the field of OT from working at several acute care, outpatient, long-term care, and rehabilitation settings. Prior to coming to VAPAHCS, Ms. Gurga spent three years as an OT at the Edith Nourse Rogers VA Hospital in Bedford, MA. She served as sole OT and coordinated the activity programming for the Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center program, a 100-bed dementia special care unit. She began her VA career at the Alexandria, LA VAMC where she worked from 1996-1999.

In 1995, Ms. Gurga received the VA Health Professional Scholarship while attending graduate school at Tufts University - Boston School of Occupational Therapy. She also received a BA degree in Business Economics from Mills College in Oakland, CA. She is currently a member of the American Occupational Therapy Association.



Curt Campbell

Dr. Keith Harris Is the New Chief, Domiciliary Service



Curt Campbell

Dr. Keith Harris received his undergraduate degree from the University of Washington, and earned his Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the University of Oregon, completing his clinical internship at VA Palo Alto HCS in 2001. After leaving the VA, he completed a postdoctoral fellowship at UCSF, where he earned the Robert E. Harris Award for Outstanding Postdoctoral Fellow in Psychology and Medicine.

In 2003, he eagerly returned to the VAPAHCS to work at the Homeless Veterans Rehabilitation Program in the Domiciliary Service. After working closely with Tom Burling, the existing Domiciliary Service Chief, Dr. Harris was asked to serve as the Acting Service Chief of the Domiciliary when Dr. Burling retired. He served as the Acting Chief for six months, and has since served the past five months as the Acting Director of the Foundation of Recovery Program. He is excited and honored to serve as the Chief of the Domiciliary Service and to continue its mission of returning homeless and substance dependent veterans to optimal independent living.

VA Palo Alto Leads the Way in Improving Home Hospice

By Michelle S. Gabriel, RN, MSN, CNS

The Palo Alto VA's Hospice and Palliative Care Program is expanding! Dr. Gary Hsin, palliative medicine attending, will spearhead this initiative along with team members Michelle Gabriel, RN, MSN, CNS, our new Palliative Care Coordinator and Eileen Schleifer, RN, Palliative Care Consult RN.

Building upon our excellent inpatient hospice program, the new initiative will focus on increasing home hospice referrals by providing educational outreach to clinicians about hospice eligibility, how to refer, as well as coordination and support of patients referred. Through these efforts, the team expects significant improvement in referral rates and meeting the wishes of many veterans desiring hospice home care.

"This should interest our health care system because providing hospice home care is a very cost-effective way to care for veterans at the end-of-life," said Dr. Jim Hallenbeck, medical director of the Hospice and Palliative Care Program. "Home hospice often averts the need for undesired acute care, which preserves precious resources for other veterans, but most importantly, it honors veterans' preferences. Many veterans, like most Americans, prefer to spend their last days at home. This is a win-win situation for veterans and our healthcare system!"

The Hospice and Palliative Care program is a member of the Hospice-Veterans partnership sponsored by the California Hospice and

Palliative Care Association (CHAPCA) which works to educate and improve access to hospice care for all veterans living in VISNs 21 and 22. Efforts are also underway to develop a more pro-active palliative care consult service in acute care with particular attention to the ICU.

In reflecting on the initiative, Dr. Jim Hallenbeck stated, "I think the key point is that our wonderful hospice unit has attracted acclaim and a lot of attention. However, we cannot rest on our laurels. All veterans who need hospice or palliative care services should be able to access such services whether they are inpatients, outpatients or at home."



Curt Campbell

Front row: (left to right) Michelle Gabriel, RN, MS CNS ; Eileen Schleifer, RN. Back row: (left to right) Jane Bush, RN; Dr. James Hallenbeck; Dr. Gary Hsin

VA Is a "Bright Star" Within U.S. Health Care

VA's health care system is "a bright star" within the health care profession for its dedication to patient safety, according to an editorial in the prestigious *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*.

"Our patients and staff know that VA's commitment to quality is second to none," said the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "It's gratifying when a top publication for health care professionals reaches the same conclusion."

The glowing comments came in the May 18 edition of the journal, which examined the progress – or, too often, the lack of progress – among private-sector health care systems during the last five years on issues affecting patient safety.

VA's health care system "quickly emerged as a bright star in the constellation of safety practice, with system-wide implementation of safe practices, training programs and the establishment of four patient-safety research centers," according to the editorial.

JAMA's authors are the latest in a list of independent reviewers who have cited VA for the quality of its health care system.

- "The Best Care Anywhere" was the headline of a January article about VA in the *Washington Monthly*.
- A study published in May 2003 in the *New England Journal of Medicine* compared VA health care and fee-for-service Medicare on 11 specific measurements of quality and found VA patients fared "significantly better" than the private sector.
- In December 2004, the *Annals of Internal Medicine* examined seven specific measurements of quality care for diabetes and again found VA ahead of its private-sector counterparts in all seven categories.
- Also in December 2004, the independent National Committee for Quality Assurance, which ranks health care plans according to 17 performance criteria, found VA out-performing America's best private sector hospitals in all 17.

EMPLOYEE NEWS

New Employees

A&MMS
Jennifer A. Willwerth

Audiology & Speech Path. Svc.
Donna S. Reilley

Blind Rehab Svc.
Amanda Corser
Amy L. Freeland
Elizabeth M. Jurco

Chief of Staff
Pamela S. Belperio

Human Resource Svc.
Lynne A. McNerney

Medical Svc.
William F. Bishop
Michele R. Helmuth
Raul L. Oviedo

Nursing Svc.
Dale Keith Adkins
Rhonda K. Eisenzimmer
Janet L. Fagan
Michelle S. Gabriel
Jefferey E. Libby
Belcy Grace P. Villarin

Office of Director
Alice Yoon Cho

Pharmacy Svc.
Sousan Mehdipour-Mossafer
Judith A. Rumsey

Phys Med & Rehab Svc.
Rachel A. Clemente
John R. Melgar
Charlene Wu

Police Svc.
Rickie A. Gable
Jeffrey B. Larrieu
James W. Mosher

Radiology Svc.
Laurie D. Carr

Readjustment Counseling Svc.
Derrick E. Felton
Benigno Garcia Sanchez

Recreation Svc.
Chris Alan Brosnan

Research Svc.
Adam Chow
Eric N. Chow
Katrin F. Chua
Kristian S. Gima
Samuel S. King
Candace L. Romandia
Lise C. Worthen

Surgery Svc.
Raymond F. Gariano
Colleen S. Schwartz

Retirees

Editha Ghani (28)
Nursing Svc.

Lydia Jones (23)
Psychiatry Svc.

Joan Keenan (31)
Nursing Svc.

Nettie Moorer (37)
Nursing Svc.

Mimi Ohms (30)
Human Resources

Eric Sabelman (20)
Research Svc.

(Years of service are indicated in parentheses.)

Employee Service Awards

10 Years

Susan Feighery
Recreation Svc.

Nanci Fleck
Nursing Svc.

Jeffrey Grant
A&MMS

Carol Hawthorne
Physical Medicine & Rehab Svc.

Jill Hudson
Social Work Svc.

Deborah Kenney
Research Svc.

Lesley Whitehead
Nursing Svc.

15 Years

Bonnie Black
Research Svc.

Gregory Burgest
Nursing Svc.

Elizabeth Caliboso
Nursing Svc.

Laurie Doerfler
Nursing Svc.

Grace Domingo
Ambulatory Care

Terri Hammock-Bebendir
Medical Svc.

Janice Jackson
Prosthetics & Sensory Aids

Faye Johnson
Social Work Svc.

Lyn Juckniess
Chaplain Svc.

Losivale Koloto
Chief of Staff

Jennifer Mina
Nursing Svc.

Cecilia Puyaoan
Canteen Svc.

James Romby
Nursing Svc.

Denise Scott
Nursing Svc.

Dennis Schwartz
Director's Office

Cecar Torres
Environmental Mgmt. Svc.

Edward Wakabayashi
Psychiatry Svc.

20 Years

Laura Bour
Nursing Svc.

Joan Dinapoli
Nursing Svc.

Nelia Gobaleza
Pathology & Lab Svc.

Raul Gonzalez
Pathology & Lab Svc.

George Guido
Medical Svc.

Sandra Yee Louie
Pathology & Lab Svc.

Edward Martinez
Environmental Mgmt. Svc.

Minerva Myer
Psychology Svc.

Karen Palmer
Nursing Svc.

Bruce Payton
A&MMS

Elizabeth Stovall
Recreation Therapy Svc.

Nancy Taylor
Nursing Svc.

Eric Topp
Research Svc.

Lawrence Tuft
Psychiatry Svc.

Marilyn Welch
Nursing Svc.

Jimmie Witcher
Domiciliary Care

25 Years

Robert Bousquet
Engineering Svc.

Maggie Bussey
Medical Svc.

Dorothy Caris
IRMS

Kathleen Cooney
Nursing Svc.

Teresita Gastelu
Nursing Svc.

Delia Hulog
Nursing Svc.

Scott Johnson
Blind Rehab Svc.

Randy Wright
Environmental Mgmt. Svc.

30 Years

Andrew Cabell
Engineering Svc.

Jennifer Foster
Nursing Svc.

Kevin Jones
Environmental Mgmt. Svc.

Judith Orr Moltzen
Social Work Svc.

35 Years

Gary Geisenhofer
Engineering Svc.

Fred Gusman
Psychiatry Svc.

Roger Pierce
Fiscal Svc.

40 Years

Filemon Madriaga
Environmental Mgmt. Svc.

Roland Narcisco
Fiscal Svc.

Mental Health Nursing Makes Learning Fun

“How to Be a Millionaire” was the theme VAPAHCS Mental Health Nursing Service used to present a Competency Faire recently at the Menlo Park and Palo Alto Divisions. The overall purpose of the event was to update employees in an interactive dynamic setting. Common medical, psychiatric, and behavioral disorders were showcased.

The game show format with over 50 audience participants at each presentation received rave reviews. The interactive format enriched nursing staff on new trends in mental health nursing care, while at the same time strengthened the unique traditional principles of psychiatric nursing.

Participants competed for “monetary” points as they “passed the test” at each educational station. The topics were based on staff interests and educational needs assessments. Subject matter selected for the faire were topics that would coach nursing staff on how to improve the care for patients with PTSD, mental health disorder and complex multiple system problems.

The new materials about “sexual trauma” by Barbara Granfors, RN, PTSD, was particularly well received as mental health areas in inpatient and outpatient clinics see an increasing number of female veterans.

The Competency Faire received excellent ratings. Plans are underway for taking this information directly to the units for small group presentations. Next year Mental Health Nursing is planning a fair with even more topics that highlight evidence based practice.



VA Expert Presenters

Back row standing (left to right): Pat Dilkian RN, Donna Ingmire RN; Nickola Napoleon NM; Vicky Huang, Pharm.; Barbara Granfors RN; Karen Jackson RN; Georgette Farrington RN; Paul Johnson RN
Sitting (left to right): Jan Elliott RN; Jing Vega NM; Marion Logan RNP; Priscilla Bryant LPS Program Manager; Daine Go-Acidera NM

Deputy Secretary of Defense Visits VAPAHCS



Frank and Erna Fichter, volunteers at the front desk, have the privilege to meet the Honorable Gordon England, Acting Deputy Secretary of Defense and former Secretary of the Navy, recently when he toured the Palo Alto hospital.

During the tour he visited ICU, hospice, pharmacy and traumatic brain injury unit meeting staff, veterans and active duty servicemen and women and their families.

“This has been a real pleasure for me,” the Secretary told a group gathered at the TBI Unit. “Each generation has had to send their men and women to defend our freedom and we all know that freedom is not free.”

Higgins Voted President of N. California BVA

Brian L. Higgins, a blind rehabilitation specialist at the Western Blind Rehab Center (WBRC), recently was elected President of the Blinded Veterans of America (BVA) Northern California Regional Group. A Navy Vietnam veteran, Higgins teaches computer and technology access to blinded veterans at the WBRC. He was treasurer/ secretary of this region when he was elected to President at a recent meeting of this group at VA Palo Alto. The BVA has an office at the WBRC and supports the welfare of the veterans at the WBRC. The group represents concerns for blind veterans of Northern California.

Nationally, the BVA is committed to developing a closer relationship among blinded veterans of our Nation, to assist their rehabilitation, to hasten their acceptance into the community and to promote peace with liberty. Among their many functions, they host white cane walks every year and sponsor and promote events for blinded veterans around the state.

Employee to Employee

SCI Vet Is an Inspiration and a Gentleman

I first met Michael Wagner over 10 years ago. A spinal cord injury had left this Vietnam veteran with no use of his legs and impaired use of his hands. He had learned some basic computer skills and wanted to help in Medical Media's illustration department. I remember thinking to myself, "What in the world will he be able to do?"



Curt Campbell

That question has evolved into, "What in the world would I do without him?"

Mike is always there – volunteering. He works on a variety of tasks: poster layout and printing, journal figures, brochures, and more. I have taught him some design skills and software tricks, but he has taught me a great deal more. I have learned about the obstacles that Mike and other spinal cord injured people face every day. More importantly, I have learned of the enormous worth and potential that every human being possesses and the impact he can have on the world if given the opportunity.

Mike was given an opportunity because he came to the VA and was treated at Spinal Cord Injury Service. He continues to be a valuable member of the Medical Media team, however, because of his selfless work ethic – his reliability, and his willingness to learn.

Thank you, Mike, for your hard work and friendship. You are truly an inspiration. I don't know what I'd do without you!

– Kris Morrow
Medical Illustrator

A Generous Woman Shares with her Heart

Chaplain Marsha Davis has been working in the Chaplain Service for many years, maybe as many as I have worked here. During my 20 years, I have seen many people come and go. Many touch other people's lives and keep on doing. She not only does her duties as a Chaplain, but she is also the 'unofficial' administrative assistant for Chaplain Bastille. Through the years I have seen how he relies on her managerial expertise as well as her spiritual support. She is always willing to do the extra tasks that others don't find in their 'job descriptions' and with a smile on her face. To top it all: she never blows her own horn. She is happy to get the job done for the greater good.

She is also involved with the women veterans and participates in different programs. She is also aware that many women who are employees and hold key and responsible positions are stressed and don't have easy access to a 'breather' or a bit of spiritual support to keep them going. To help them do a good job, be good and responsible employees, as well as mothers, friends and partners in their personal lives, she created a Woman's Forum that meets once a week during lunch. This small forum means a great deal to its participants who draw strength from its core. We become better human beings when we are able to share and comfort each other while discussing profound topics that touch our spiritual needs.

This is an exceptional woman who reaches out and shares with her heart. We are honored to have someone of her stature in our midst.

– Marcia DeCalisto
Program Clerk



Getting Our Feet Wet - Diving into MPD's Labor Pool

At first, it seems like just another picture-perfect summer day at the MPD VA.

But then it happens... disaster strikes.

You are instructed to report immediately to the MPD labor pool. Thoughts of your daily deadlines and hectic schedule evaporate as concerns for your own loved ones replace them. New thoughts emerge. "What is the labor pool?" "Where is it?" "What will I be doing?" And of course, "Do I really have to report?"



These are some questions that the 35 VA employees (spanning 10 different services) had when they arrived at the labor pool mock activation and missing "patient" drill located at the MPD gymnasium. It was soon clear to everyone – nursing assistant, engineer, psychologist, ward clerk, doctor or volunteer, that everyone had a role.

The MPD VA labor pool, coordinated by Recreation Therapy Service, is part of a nation-wide, Hospital Emergency Incident Command System (HEICS). The drill included training staff on missing patient procedures as well as evaluating the individual labor pool stations. Some of the stations included: sign-in areas; credentialing of non-VA employees and volunteers; labor pool command center, kids korner, first aid station and the comfort room for employees who may need additional support prior to receiving a labor pool work assignment

"The set-up amenities included in the Labor Pool Staging area were well thought out, organized and comforting," said Mary Duvall, staff nurse "They were efficient yet provided critical areas for staff R&R during a disaster situation."

After an overview of the missing patient policy and tour, Sgt Elliot Carter and Officer Joe Provencio instructed everyone how to conduct a grid search and use proper radio etiquette. Employee search teams then went outside to scour the grounds for our missing patient. Fleet-footed Phil Torie, recreation therapist, played the patient, who of course was found after a full search of the grounds.

An after action debriefing with all of the searchers concluded this exciting exercise. Don Gintel stated, "This was the best organized and well executed mock drill that I have had an opportunity to be involved in at the VA."



Peck on the Cheek

Carl Koprek, a carpenter at Menlo Park, plays the guitar, sings, writes songs, and in his spare time, charms feathered friends.

VAPAHCS Staff Send Thanks to Our Volunteers

Health care is constantly evolving, and so is the role of volunteers.

Today VA health care is more than treating a veteran's specific injury or ailment. It's about building healthy communities, about partnering with veterans to help them avoid illness by living healthier and more satisfying lives, and about making sure veterans' families receive the help and support they need while their loved ones are under VA care.

Caring for veterans' families is one area where volunteers are moving beyond their traditional roles, particularly at VAPAHCS, and more than 350 Palo Alto and Livermore volunteers were recently recognized with certificates and luncheons.

"As we celebrate National Volunteer Week," said Bill Ball, chief of Voluntary Service, "we thank our volunteers for stepping forward to fill a need. We thank them for their kindness and unwavering devotion to serving those who served to defend freedom. The time and talents they share with us are crucial to maintaining the services we provide."

VA Palo Alto Health Care System has one of the largest volunteer programs in VA. Last year, 1,682 volunteers contributed more than 336,000 hours. Monetary and in-kind donations exceeded \$900,000. But the real measure of their impact is seen in the smiles of hospitalized veterans comforted by the knowledge that they are not alone; that their sacrifices on the fields of battle are not forgotten.

Ball added, "To all our volunteers, I offer my humble gratitude and encourage you to share your experiences here with your family, friends and neighbors. Tell them what you do, how you make a positive impact on veterans' lives and how that makes you feel. This week we honor and celebrate your efforts."

Rare Surgery

Continued from page 1

Daisy Wong and Susan Johansen; perfusionist Tonya Blodgett; anesthesiologists Kevin Fish and Steve Schaefer; and surgeons Tom Burdon, Jim Fann and Basen Safadi, and residents Russel Woo from surgery and Zed Reagan from anesthesia

"The fact is," said Dr. Burdon, "only in VA could you pull together seven physicians and three operating room nurses for nine hours. Few private hospitals or insurance companies would pay for that."

Frick was astounded to find out so much effort had been made for him. "I guess my eight years in the Army has really paid off," he said. "I have Dr. Wren on a tall pedestal. I know she saved my life and that she couldn't have done it without the hospital's support. I have been treated by an A-1 team in surgery and on the ward. I simply couldn't have gotten better care anywhere."



Chuck Revell

VAPAHCS' Golden Volunteer Club

The Golden Volunteer Club is made up of volunteers 90 years old or more, and this year the club gained three new members, giving it the largest number ever — five active, loving volunteers who have lived nine decades or longer. From left to right: Rudy Monte, 91; Hellen Casson, 90; Carl Cada, 90; Dorothy Loring, 95; and Elma Lange, 96. Director Lisa Freeman is just a kid in comparison!!!!

VA Student Volunteers Honored by Stanford

VAPAHCS' United Students for Veterans' Health (USVH) recently were chosen to receive Stanford University's 2005 Community Partnership Award.

The USVH is a national student-led volunteer organization created to aid in the care and to enrich the lives of veterans across the nation. USVH strives to help long-term-care patients in Veterans Affairs hospitals. A Stanford University volunteer student founded USVH in the spring of 1994 after discovering a group of patients suffering from loneliness in the Alzheimer's ward at the Palo Alto VA Hospital.

The VAPAHCS program has 40 volunteers who spend their afternoons and evenings with the patients going on walks, playing games and engaging in conversation. Typically, these elderly patients suffer from some type of cognitive impairment such as Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia.

Maria Shriver Visits VA Palo Alto



It was her first visit to a VA hospital and Maria Shriver, First Lady of California and former ABC anchor, was impressed. She visited the ICU unit, where she met with staff and was shown how VA's CPRS worked and how it interfaced with Bar-Code Medication and the pharmacy. Additionally, she had an opportunity to meet veterans recovering from surgery. Her visit concluded with a tour of the Spinal Cord Injury Unit and the Traumatic Brain Injury Unit, where she met with staff and service members who had been injured in Iraq and their families. Her parting words? "Make sure you invite me to the grand opening of your Fisher House!"



Kathy Kelly Makes Golden Age Games a Reality for Veterans



Twenty two veterans from Livermore traveled to Oklahoma recently to participate in the Golden Age Games and brought home 20 Gold, Bronze and Silver medals. Recreation therapy staff prepared for the games for several months, encouraging veterans and assisting with applications and coordinating doctors, coaches and transportation. Kathy Kelly, recreation therapist, has been taking patients to the Games for the past 14 years.

"If it weren't for Kathy, we wouldn't be going to the Games," said one vet. "Kathy has done so many things for so many people," said another. Beth Stovall, chief of Recreation Therapy Service acknowledges that Kathy is dedicated to creating a highly therapeutic, positive experience that contributes to the overall well being of our aging veterans' population.

TBI Unit Celebrates Chavez's Promotion

It was a touching ceremony that brought tears to the eyes of Army Capt. Andrew Chavez's wife, Elice, and others in the audience, too. What was additionally moving was that Marine Corps Capt. Curtis Smith pinned on the new bars. Both officers were West Point graduates, both officers had served in Iraq and both officers were recovering from serious injuries on VAPAHCS' Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Unit. The orders were read by Sgt. 1st Class Scott Harbaugh, a combat veteran who had served in Afghanistan and was also going through TBI rehabilitation. The only complaint about the ceremony and reception afterwards came from one of the Lance Corporals, who said, "All we are missing is the keg of beer!"



Cadence Systems, Inc. Raises \$1.2 Million for Fisher House

Cadence Design Systems in San Jose raised nearly \$1.3 million at its “Stars & Strikes” bowling tournament on May 16. With the VA Palo Alto’s Fisher House Foundation named as major beneficiary, proceeds will be used to begin construction of a 21-suite Fisher House, a “home away from home,” for the families of veterans receiving treatment at the VA Hospital in Palo Alto. As a result, VAPAHCS was able to conduct its ground breaking ceremony on June 16.

More than 220 Silicon Valley companies stepped up to the strike zone and supported Cadence’s bowling tournament. Corporate bowlers teamed up with 49er players and competed for bowling tournament trophies, followed by an auction of donated items, such as autographed sports memorabilia, vacation getaways and consumer electronics items. The tournament was held at AMF Oakridge Lanes, which donated the facility for the day’s events.



“Having a Fisher House facility at the Palo Alto VA Hospital was a dream just a few short months ago,” said Lisa Freeman, director of the VA Palo Alto Health Care System. “Now, we will break ground in a month and, by this time next year, the families of veterans will have a place to call home while their loved ones are patients at our facility. I am truly grateful for the generosity of the Cadence Stars & Strikes effort, the 49ers organization and the entire corporate community in Silicon Valley.”

“The Fisher House becomes a reality thanks to the generous support of our customers, partners, vendors and even our competitors,” said Cadence Executive Chairman Ray Bingham. “I am proud of our Stars and Strikes event, which has supported worthy organizations in our community since 1990. This year’s recipients, the Palo Alto VA Hospital and the Fisher Foundation, will benefit the families of U.S. servicemen and women for many years to come.



Director Lisa Freeman shows off the Cadence Fisher House bowling shirt.

Left, Alice Espindola, Tony Fitzgerald, and Nora Lynn Dwinell volunteer at Stars & Strikes Bowling Tournament, along with about 20 other VAPAHCS employees.

Blue Star Moms Walk 37 Miles



The South Bay Blue Star Moms held a two-day walkathon in May to raise donations for the VAPAHCS’ new Fisher House. Blue Star Mom Barbara Serranno organized the event and with others walked 37 miles from Morgan Hill to the Palo Alto VA hospital. VA’s Bill Ball and John Sisty were on hand to welcome the walkers and thank them for the \$15,000 raised by donations to the walkathon.

The South Bay Blue Star Moms is a group of mothers who support fellow members, our sons and daughters serving in the Armed Forces, our Veterans, and our communities. Their goal is to share educational information to benefit the members and their families; to support military personnel through various service activities; to support Veterans’ organizations activities and events; and to promote causes that will benefit military personnel through a military advocacy program. For more information visit their website: www.southbaybluestarmoms.org.

Fisher House Construction Begins

Veterans, service members, families, community fundraisers and hospital staff joined together for the eagerly-awaited Groundbreaking Ceremony for VAPAHCS' new Fisher House. Rita Williams, KTVU Channel 2 reporter who produced the first news story to publicize fundraising efforts, emceed the event (top left photo). Principal speakers included Lisa Freeman, director VAPAHCS; Ray Bingham, executive chairman of Cadence Design Systems, Inc.; Dave Coker, executive director Fisher House Foundation; and special guests, Lt. and Mrs. Scott Smiley (right top photo). Also participating in the groundbreaking was the California Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Tom Johnson (bottom left photo on left), and the color team from the Onizuka Air Force Station (center top photo).

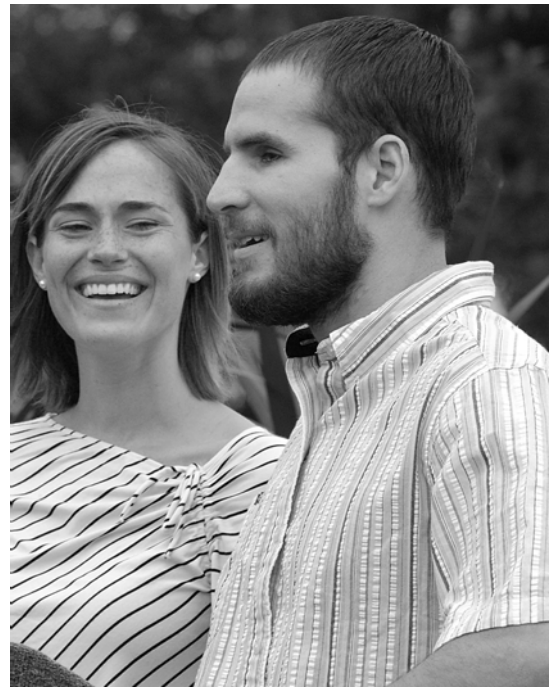
Special thanks to the PTSD Chorus, led by Chaplains Ed Bastille and Virginia Jackson; and to our veteran service organization representatives who presented the ceremonial shovels to the

groundbreakers: Rena Estes, Mike Solome, Al Tortalano, Pat Klang, Barbara Serrano and Gladys Bemis (bottom right photo).

Highlight of the ceremony was an emotional speech given by Lt. Smiley and his wife, Tiffany, who spoke of how important the house would be to them. Smiley was blinded and seriously injured by a suicide car bomb in Iraq. He is learning coping techniques at VAPAHCS' Western Blind Rehabilitation Center.

The new Fisher House will be one of the largest ever built and will house up to 21 families. It will be free of charge and open to children. It will serve all veterans' families for decades to come and hopefully will be completed by the end of the year. Keep your fingers crossed.

Special thanks to all the employees who donated money and worked to help make this wonderful event possible. Particular thanks to Jason Nietupski, whose initial proposal for a Fisher House two years ago set the entire process in motion.



Photos by Chuck Ravell

You Make a Difference!

Submitted by our veterans and their families



“Ms. Lynn Dempsey, CNS, helped me with my brother who is handicapped and lives more than two hours away from here. She helped me make his appointment for surgery. She always called me back and was very nice. She gave me good directions. She’s the Best!”

– A Family Member

“I just wanted to write and let you know that I was treated very professionally at your hospital. The staff was great! Sue Cottle was most helpful and very informative. I could not ask for better services in any hospital. Keep up the good work! Thanks for caring.”

– A Veteran



“I have observed Mr. James Romby, medical support assistant, many times and he is always courteous, polite, knowledgeable, positive, supportive and a great asset to the VA. Despite the multitude of pressures from patients and telephone calls, he clearly gives 110% to his position and sets a great example for others.”

– A Veteran

“Dr. Gordon Gao’s recent phone call to me was certainly appreciated. He took the time to keep me posted and so very promptly, clearly indicating an interest in my well-being that is rarely found in today’s environment. I want you to know that his care has made me feel very grateful.”

– A Veteran



“Ms. Linda Kleinsaser went out of her way to ensure I got the correct dosage of my blood pressure medicine. She coordinated with my doctor and the pharmacy to close the issue. It would have taken me two weeks and she did it in 10 minutes! I am indebted to her.”

– A Veteran

“Kudos to Mr. Rick Mason in housekeeping. He goes out of his way to keep things clean and neat. He is a big help with some of the patients and helps them go to the blind center. He always has a smile on his face!”

– A Blind Veteran



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